

A
S E R M O N

Preached at YORK on the 29th of March, 1780,

For the BENEFIT of the

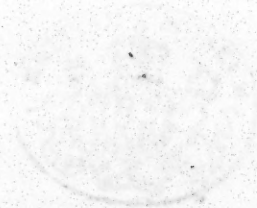
LUNATIC ASYLUM;

By JAMES SCOTT, D.D.

[PRICE ONE SHILLING.]

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LUNATIC ASYLUM.

By JAMES SCOTT, D.D.

Rector of Simonburn,

And late Fellow of Trinity College, Cambridge.

SONO MAGGIORI LI SPAVENTI, CHE I MALI. MACH.

Y O R K :

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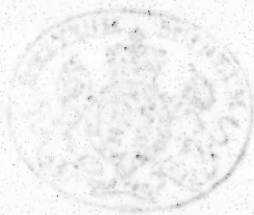
TO THE
GOVERNORS OF THE LUNATIC ASYLUM,
AT YORK,

THE FOLLOWING DISCOURSE,
PUBLISHED AT THEIR REQUEST,
AND FOR THE BENEFIT OF THAT
CHARITY,
IS VERY RESPECTFULLY INSCRIBED,

BY THEIR MOST OBEDIENT

HUMBLE SERVANT,

JAMES SCOTT.



* * * The YORK LUNATIC ASYLUM was erected with a view to discourage the lower kind of private Mad-houses. It is confined to no district, but extends its Benevolence to the poor and indigent in every quarter of his Majesty's dominions. The present expence to each patient is Eight Shillings per week, which includes Diet, Washing, Lodging, and Medicines; but as soon as a fund can be raised by the Liberality of the Public, the payment will be lowered.

Donations are received at the York Banks; and all letters concerning the business of the Asylum are requested to be addressed to A. Hunter, Physician, in York.

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S E R M O N.

MARK V. 15.

AND THEY COME TO JESUS, AND SEE HIM THAT
WAS POSSESSED WITH THE DEVIL, AND HAD
THE LEGION, SITTING, AND CLOTHED, AND
IN HIS RIGHT MIND.

NOTHING has occasioned greater misunderstanding, perplexity, and divisions in the Christian World, than particular passages of Holy Scripture, taken in a too strict and literal sense, without any regard to the peculiar modes of thinking, and terms of expression which at that time prevailed. Our blessed Saviour and his Apostles accommodated their language to the general apprehensions of mankind, though founded, perhaps, upon popular prejudice, or the vague appearances of things. They were not commissioned to instruct us in the polite arts, to correct our errors in science, or furnish us with true systems of Philosophy:—

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No!

No! but to regulate our wills, to amend our hearts, and to teach us that wisdom which will make us "wise unto salvation." Upon this account it is remarkable that they never interfered, during the whole course of their Ministry, in explaining the physical Causes and Effects of things: And indeed it was not necessary that they should; for the great Author of Nature having expanded before us the fair Volume of the Creation, and impressed upon the mind of man an insatiable thirst after Knowledge, which would keep him constantly in action, and lead him by degrees from one truth to another, there was no occasion for an extraordinary Revelation to correct any of his mistakes or wanderings: nay, a Revelation of this kind would have been not unnecessary only, but highly prejudicial to our happiness; as it would have destroyed that inquisitive disposition, which is the main spring whereby we are actuated; and have reduced us to a state of listless indolence, and worse than monkish supineness. Our Saviour, therefore, and his Apostles never attempted to instruct mankind in matters of this nature, but adapted their language, in points to which their commission did not extend, to the received notions and common opinions of the world.

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Now, amongst these one of the most general, and at the same time most extraordinary, was the Belief of DEMONIACAL Possessions, which had its origin and birth in the East; was nursed and cherished by the Greeks and Romans; and in this western world, having been fostered in the kindred breast of Papacy, grew to such a monstrous and gigantic size, that it held mankind in awe and astonishment. I should be ashamed to enumerate the scandalous frauds and sottish superstitions which this has occasioned; the whole trade of Exorcisms, accompanied with all the mockery and mummetry of frantic and fanatic agitations, (practiced for so many ages with such success and profit in the Romish Church) having arisen from hence. To what a monstrous pitch they carried their impositions upon the understanding and credulity of mankind, we may collect from this circumstance, that they performed their solemn Conjurations upon the vilest and most contemptible Reptiles; they read their sacred service of Holy Exorcism over Rats and Mice. Indeed, for some time after the Reformation, when we began to emerge from that worse than Egyptian darkness, which for so many centuries had over-spread all Christendom, the belief of this doctrine gave occasion

tion to endless Superstitions and Absurdities. Fascination and Witchcraft were a capital article of Religion: Priests were convened to drive out Devils from those who were said to be possessed; and Courts of Justice, composed of Magistrates, who ought to have had more understanding than the vulgar, were employed in trying Sorcerers and Witches, who were found guilty sometimes upon their own distracted confessions, and at others upon the pretended evidence of the Devils themselves. But, blessed be God for continuing to enlighten our minds still further, such debasing superstitions as these are all over; and the stories of Witchcraft, Sorceries, Possessions, and Exorcisms, are now regarded only as idle tales, the wicked inventions of Fraud, or the harmless visions of Credulity!

Nor does the reality of those possessions, which are recorded in Holy Scripture, rest upon so secure and firm a basis, as the advocates for this system pretend to establish. I have not time to enter into a full discussion of all the arguments which they produce in support of their doctrine, and shall therefore select only one or two, which seem to be the keystone, as it were, that supports all their reasoning.

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1. And the first is, That the persons represented in Scripture as Demoniacs, did constantly speak of themselves, and act in such a manner, as if they were really possessed. Nor is this at all wonderful: for having been educated in the common belief that persons afflicted with particular disorders, with Madness, for instance, and Epilepsy, were under the agency of Demons; being firmly persuaded, in the vigour of health and reason, of the reality of such possessions, it is natural enough that, shattered as they were in mind and body, they should still maintain their favourite delusion. It is the distinguishing character of madness, to reason right upon wrong principles: and the firm belief of Possessions being at that time a principle universally adopted, it is no wonder that the unhappy objects did not only reason and act as if they were really possessed, but even sometimes personate the Demon, by whom they supposed themselves to be inhabited.

2. The second Argument is drawn from the language made use of by Christ and his Apostles, in speaking of these Demoniacs. And here let it be observed, that the doctrine of Possessions having been generally received in the world, long before

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the coming of our blessed Saviour, he was obliged either to adopt the accustom'd modes of speaking upon this subject, or he must have formed a new system and a new language concerning it. But a new system would not have been readily received, where the common opinions were so stubborn and inveterate; and consequently a new language would have been obscure and unintelligible. Besides, Christ did not come into the world, as I have intimated before, to give us new systems of Physic or Philosophy, which are fit subjects for the mind of man to exercise itself upon; and therefore he was under a necessity of adopting the common language, though founded on opinions manifestly erroneous.

It was frequent with the sacred writers, and even our Saviour himself, to speak on many subjects in the language of the vulgar, though known and acknowledged to have been grounded originally on a false Philosophy. But then this language was always well adapted to express the *appearances of things*; and was particularly so in the case of these Demoniacs; the symptoms of whose disorders, and their cure, could not have been described more powerfully and exactly. A general declaration of
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their insanity would not have given us that precise and clear idea of their respective cases which we now entertain, when we read of one, that he had an "unclean Spirit;" of another, that he had a "dumb and deaf Spirit;" of a third, that she had "seven Devils;" and of the Demoniac in my text, that "his name was Legion," because "they were many."

If we consider attentively the behaviour of this deplorable object, as recorded by the Evangelists, we shall perceive that there are no signs of extraordinary sagacity, such as mark the agency of a Spirit of celestial origin; nay, that every thing he says and does is absurd, contradictory, and preposterous under such a supposition. On the other hand, if we regard him as a mere Madman, under the popular delusion of his being possessed, his whole conduct is painted by the hand of a master, and presents us with one of the liveliest and most striking pictures of insanity. He had heard, no doubt, of the fame of Jesus for casting out Devils; and perceiving a company at a distance, he ran in a violent paroxysm of his disorder to assault them, being, as we are told, "exceeding fierce, so that no man might pass that way." But Jesus, who was at the head of them, having rebuked

buked him, he cried out and fell down before him, and said, "What have I to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of the most high God?" Persuaded that he was an evil Demon, or at least under such an agency, he felt a dread of Christ's power, and adjures him "not to torment him before the time;" that is, the time appointed for the punishment of wicked Spirits, who, as St. Jude informs us, are "reserved in chains under darkness to the judgment of the great day." Then rambling to another idea, created by insanity, he beseeches him that he would not "command them to go out into the deep." Our blessed Master, to give his followers an opportunity of observing the height of this poor creature's distraction, and at the same time the greatness of his own power, "asks him his name." My name, says he, "is Legion, because we are many." What a wild preposterous answer was this? But he spake what his disorder dictated, and confounded himself with a Legion of Devils, under whose agency he thought himself acting. Just at this instant, as his eyes wandered about, he perceived at some distance a herd of swine feeding, and besought Jesus that they might enter into them; a request not unlikely for a Madman to make, but utterly inconsistent with
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the sagacity of an intelligent Spirit, who had just before expressed a dread of perishing, and would have foreseen, no doubt, the consequences of such a dismissal. This request our Saviour thought proper to grant; and the Madness left the man, and entered into the swine, who "ran violently down a steep place into the sea, and perished." The destruction of the swine might be intended, perhaps, as a punishment to the owners for polluting themselves with such a sordid merchandise; and at the same time served to ascertain the reality, and spread the fame of the miracle that was wrought upon the Demoniac.

From the whole survey of this transaction, which has been strongly insisted upon by the favourers of the Demoniac system, it appears clearly that the man was furious and distracted; but that he was really possessed by Devils is a doctrine envelop'd with difficulties inexplicable.

Possession in the earliest times implied Insanity—it implied the Effect, as well as the apprehended Cause. Indeed the Ancients did not in this case argue from the Cause to the Effect, but rather from

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the Effect to the Cause: when they perceived certain appearances and symptoms, which they could not account for upon rational principles, nor trace from natural causes (and their knowledge of the physical Causes and Effects of things was very narrow and confined) they had recourse immediately to supernatural agency, and ascribed them to possession. But they would not have done this, if they had had that intimate knowledge of the structure and œconomy of the human body, which is the glory and happiness of the present age. They would then have perceived that there is no disease, with which this frail and feverish Being can possibly be tormented, no disease, I say, so wonderful in its appearances, and horrible in its effects, but it may be accounted for from bodily indisposition. But if God can inflict every species of malady upon mankind by natural causes, how irrational is it to suppose that he should employ supernatural means, much more that he should put it in the power of wicked and malignant Spirits to torture us at their wanton pleasure?

Nor does this Antidemoniac doctrine, as some have unfairly suggested, degrade the power, or disparage the miracles of Christ. The cures which he performed

formed on these miserable wretches, supposing them to have been Madmen only, were so unexpected and astonishing, so palpably marked by the finger of God, that they will flash conviction in the face of the most hardened infidel. What a stupendous exertion of divine power must it be, to cure in an instant every species of confirmed and inveterate Madness by a single word? The celebrated fiat of the Deity, "Let there be light, and there was light," is not more demonstrative of Omnipotence, than by speaking to relume the understanding long darken'd by disease, and extinguished by insanity! Reason is the light of the soul—put out the light, and then—ah! Christians, how difficult, how impossible, in many cases, for all the art of man to restore its pristine brightness! But our Saviour did it with a word, with a look—whatever the species of madness was, he dispersed it in an instant. Whether the surly Spirit Melancholy had seized a poor wretch, and drawn him far from the chearful haunts of men, to tombs and sepulchres, the silent, sequestered, sombrous receptacles of the dead;—or frantic and furious no chains could hold him, no fetters bind him, but he burst them asunder, and fell fiercely upon every thing that came in his way;—in both cases he
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was an object of our Saviour's power and compassion, and a single word could make him whole !

It was these miracles that, above all others, convinced mankind of the divinity of our Saviour's commission, as well as of the benevolence and philanthropy of his nature. Nothing, indeed, could equal his power except his goodness, in thus relieving the most helpless, forlorn, and miserable part of the creation. All other calamities of life, such as the loss of friends, fortune, and health, are trifling and insignificant evils, compared with the loss of Reason; that bosom Friend, which assuages all our woes, and doubles all our pleasures; that "pearl of great price," which is more inestimable than the treasures of both Indies; that health of the soul, which can alone give us an earnest and foretaste of Immortality. In many of the common afflictions of this world, we can sometimes avoid distressing perceptions, by turning away from those objects which excite them. But this is not in the power of a Madman—for let him go whither he will, he carries his delusive perceptions along with him—horrible shadows, and ideal mockery still pursue his footsteps—he hears distinct sounds, where there is a profound silence to
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other men—he sees objects, the daggers of the mind, where we can see nothing—he bends his eye on vacancy, and holds conversation with the viewless air: and though all this be the coinage of his own brain, yet is he as thoroughly convinced that it is not his own invention, as we ourselves are, that what we hear, and see, and converse with, is a reality, and no imagination or contrivance of our own.

Again; if we view the poor Lunatic in another light, we shall perceive that of all men he is most miserable, and most worthy of compassion: though formed by nature for the comforts of social life, he alone is a hapless Unit, a forlorn Individual. He stands in the world like a rock in the midst of the vast Atlantic, the dread and terror of those who approach him, and exposed to the fury of his own wild and tempestuous passions! Cut off from all the relations and charities of life, he is dead to the joys of friendship, the soft endearments of conjugal tenderness, the inexpressible heart-felt yearnings of paternal affection, and every other gentle sympathy, which God has graciously ordained to make our journey through this vale of tears less wearisome and painful. In short, Insanity

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is the parent of dismal thoughts, distracting terrors, and horrible apparitions; which not only rob the soul of the sweetest comforts, and most endearing connections of human life; but render it also incapable of those purer and sublimer pleasures, which arise from a pursuit of knowledge, an investigation of truth, the study of religion, a communion with God and Christ, and a steadfast assurance of a glorious and blessed immortality.

Surely the divine Philanthropist, who went about doing good, could not select fitter objects of his power and compassion than these; nor can we better imitate his example, than by promoting the institution, for which I am here an advocate; an institution founded entirely for the relief of these afflicted, pitiable wretches.

Madness has been well distinguished by an able Physician^a into two sorts, original and consequential: the former, perhaps, is seldom entirely cured; but the latter, which arises from accidental causes, from a sudden translation, for instance, of any acrid humour from the surface of the body to the nerves, from immoderate drinking, from fevers, from the

^a Dr. Battie.

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violence of passions, such as the exorbitancy of love and joy, the impetuosity of grief and rage, or the extravagances of fear and terror, will generally yield, like other chronical disorders, to proper medical treatment. But the misfortune is that, in many places, assistance of this kind is neither so immediate as to do much good, nor so cheap and moderate, as to lie within the reach of persons in a low, or even middling situation of life. Thousands of useful members have been lost to society, by having been consigned over to parish Work-houses; and, as to private Madhouses, it is a matter of infamous notoriety, that they are generally conducted by persons who have no medical abilities at all; or, if they are possessed of a small smattering of physic, the cure of the miserable patient is too often protracted to an enormous length, for the private emolument of the mercenary keeper. These mischiefs are effectually remedied by the LUNATIC ASYLUM, for which I am now speaking; an Asylum under the direction of men of principles and honour; and carefully and constantly visited by an excellent physician^b, whose skill and integrity in his profession can only be equalled by his humanity and disinterestedness; and who reaps no other ad-

^b Dr. A. Hunter.

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vantage from his trouble and attendance, except the silent testimony of a good conscience, and the certain approbation of good men.

I shall not pay so bad a compliment to the charitable feelings of this Audience, as to make use of the high-colouring of rhetoric to move their compassion. I shall not wound their ears with the wild ravings of outrageous frenzy, gnashing his teeth, tearing his hair, threatening destruction to those who approach him, and ready, through excess of anguish, to lay violent hands on himself: nor shall I dip my pencil in that deep black melancholy, with which some wretched souls are besmeared, and paint a group of miserable objects, silent and fullen, wrapt up in a profound trance, in a lethargic stupor, with their eyes open, and their senses shut:—No! let us turn aside from these ruins of Reason—let us throw a veil over such humiliation, as human nature must shudder to behold, and reflect a moment to whom it is that we ourselves are indebted for all the blessings we enjoy, and for that especially, which is the greatest of all others, the blessing of a sound mind: To whom but to the gracious Author and Preserver of our frame, does the subtlest Politician,
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the deepest Philosopher, and the soundest Divine; to whom does the Man of the quickest sensibility, the brightest imagination, the strongest judgment owe it, that he was not born an Idiot, or that he is not now among the number of those whom Passion or Disease has deprived of Reason? How ought we then to embrace every opportunity of expressing our gratitude to the Author and Giver of all good things, who has bestowed upon us sound faculties, and continued to us the enjoyment of them unimpaired and perfect? But what better method can we possibly use, to testify the grateful sense we have of his goodness, than to alleviate the sufferings of these afflicted wretches, labouring under the most dreadful of all visitations, “the arrows of the Almighty drinking up their spirits?” Can we do any thing more acceptable to the Great God of Nature, than to exert the utmost of our abilities in repairing these ruined pieces of Nature, the flaws, if I may so speak, and deformity of his work;—these shattered wrecks of Humanity, which make the picture of life so distressing and dismal? Consider ye, who at this instant bask yourselves in the full sunshine of Reason, who are beloved by your Relatives, esteemed by your Friends, and caressed by your Acquaintance; who

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can provide, by honest industry, all the necessaries and comforts of life for your dependent families ; or, if Providence has blest you with a competent fortune, can employ your leisure in elegant amusements, or improving studies ;—consider, ye that are so highly favoured, how “ fearfully and wonderfully ye are made !” that the slightest accident, which ye could neither foresee nor prevent, may rob you in an instant of all these blessings ; may “ bind you in chains of darkness,” and overcast “ your Reason with the black veil of forgetfulness !” —should ye be thus “ exiled,” as it were, “ from the eternal Providence,” need I describe the fears, the tumults, the terrors of your souls ;—what monstrous phantoms, and horrible apparitions would visit your waking slumbers, making this night of Reason hideous and intolerable ? No !—let me rather remind you of the sweet delight, the transporting pleasure you would feel, in being restored to the use of Reason ; restored to your country, your friends, your families, and yourselves !—And can ye refuse your utmost endeavours to rescue a number of your poor Brethren from the same deplorable wretchedness which ye so sincerely dread and deprecate ? Can ye refuse your liberal assistance to this benevolent and noble Charity for which I am
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now speaking ;—a Charity, that ministers to a mind diseased, that is calculated to wipe off all tears from the eye of Anguish, and to raze out those images of Horror, which are deep engraved on the tables of a dark and distempered Fancy ? No, Christians !— I am persuaded better and kinder things of you :—I am persuaded that ye have a feeling sense of the high value of your own understandings, and will express it in a proper manner, by making a right use of them, by contributing to the relief of those who unfortunately are deprived of theirs.—Need I add too, I am persuaded that ye have a tender regard for the honour of your City, and that ye will gladly promote an Institution, which is one of the greatest blessings and ornaments of it ?—May the great God of Heaven, the Father of all Mercies, who sent his Son Jesus Christ “ to seek and to save that which was lost,” graciously accept of what ye bestow, and sanctify it to the recovery of these forlorn wretches, and to the salvation of your immortal souls !

Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise and good God, be honour and glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

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